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SUBJECT: PAKISTAN MEDIA REACTION: FEBRUARY 25, 2009

Summary: Reports of the Taliban's declaration of "indefinite ceasefire in Swat valley" and order to militants to "stop attacks on security forces" dominated all front pages on Wednesday and overshadowed reports of Prime Minister Gilani's announcement to "wind up the National Security Council (NSC)." U.S. Special Envoy Holbrooke's remarks that the "review consultation meetings between the top diplomats of the three allies would help build mutual trust" received prominent coverage in several major dailies. Foreign Minister Qureshi and Army Chief Kiyani's visit to Washington and their meetings with the U.S. officials continued to garner extensive media coverage.

Most major newspapers continued to run editorials on the recent peace accord in Swat, and its impact on other parts of the country. The centrist national English daily, "The News," noted that "there is nothing in the peace plan about punishment for those who committed all kinds of atrocities for months in Swat." The Lahore-based liberal daily, "Daily Times," observed that the "developments in Swat will remain uncertain until all ambiguities are removed." However, the Peshawar-based Urdu daily, "Mashriq," described the peace deal in Swat as "pragmatic approach" of the NWFP administration. End Summary.

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News Stories  
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"Militants Declare Indefinite Swat Ceasefire" "Dawn" (02/25)

"The Taliban announced on Tuesday an unconditional ceasefire for an indefinite period and ordered militants to stop attacks on security forces. They also asked all NGOs to leave Swat. After the ceasefire announcement, the militants released seven police and FC personnel."

"Bajaur Calm As Government Responds To Taliban Ceasefire" "The News" (02/25)

"Almost seven months after a military operation was launched in Bajaur, calm and peace prevailed in the militancy-torn tribal region on Tuesday where the government announced a four-day ceasefire to reciprocate the unspecified armistice of Maulvi Faqir Mohammad-led Taliban militants."

"Four-Day Truce Sparks Jubilation In Bajaur" "Dawn" (02/25)

"There was widespread jubilation in Bajaur as security forces announced on Tuesday that they were suspending military operation

against militants in the agency for four days in response to a ceasefire announced by Taliban, Political Agent Shafeerullah Khan told journalists."

"Militants Reshape Future Strategy" "The Nation" (02/25)

"Taliban and Al Qaeda have started preparations for what they anticipate a major spring offensive of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, and the decision to silence guns in Swat and Bajaur is a part of their new strategy."

"Swat Deal Not Enough: Holbrooke" "The Nation" (02/25)

"U.S. special envoy for Pakistan and Afghanistan Richard Holbrooke underlined on Tuesday that the U.S. would always stand by the people of Pakistan through thick and thin. Holbrooke met Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi in Washington and noted that the government of Pakistan must do more on Swat agreement. Terming it the so-called accord, Holbrooke said the agreement is not enough."

"Trilateral Talks On U.S. Policy Review Tomorrow" "The News" (02/25)

"U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton will meet with both her Pakistani and Afghan counterparts on Thursday to discuss the situation in Afghanistan. 'We obviously want to hear from a wide variety of voices about the situation with regard to Afghanistan and Pakistan,' State Department spokesman Robert Wood told reporters."

"U.S. Will Not Quit Region, Says Holbrooke" "Dawn" (02/25)

"Richard Holbrooke, the U.S. special envoy for Pakistan and Afghanistan, has said that the United States will not quit the region and will stay as long as it takes to eradicate terrorism from there. Holbrooke said in an interview to PBS television."

"NSC To Be Abolished Soon, Says Gilani" "Dawn" (02/25)

"Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani said on Tuesday that the government had decided to wind up the National Security Council (NSC). Talking to journalists in Islamabad, the Prime Minister said 'a bill will soon be tabled in the National Assembly and the law minister has been asked to prepare the bill.'"

"Review To Help Build Trust, Says Holbrooke" "The News" (02/25)

"U.S. Special Representative for Pakistan and Afghanistan Richard Holbrooke has expressed the hope that the review consultation meetings between the top diplomats of the three allies would help build mutual trust for effective cooperation for security in the region, the diplomat told newsmen in brief remarks at the Pakistani Embassy on Monday."

"Swat Deal A Local Solution To Local Problem: Qureshi" "Dawn" (02/25)

"Foreign Minister Mahmood Qureshi said on Tuesday that the Swat peace deal was only a 'local solution to a local problem,' which is quite dispensation of justice. It is not any appeasement towards the militants, he said to the media in Washington."

"Army Chief Attracts Washington's Elite" "Dawn" (02/25)

"Pakistan's Army Chief is the most sought after man in Washington, although both the Pakistani and U.S. defense establishments are being very secretive about his engagements in the U.S. capital.... Washington's elite queued up outside the Pakistan Embassy on Monday evening when Ambassador Husain Haqqani hosted a dinner for him and Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi."

"Kayani Meets CIA, NI Chiefs" "The News" (02/25)

"Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani on Monday called on CIA Director Leon Panetta, National Intelligence Director Admiral Dennis C. Blair and Commander Special Operations Command (SOCOM) Admiral Eric T. Olson. During the separate meetings, matters of mutual interest and cooperation were discussed."

"COAS Visits U.S. National Defence University" "The News" (02/25)

"Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani who is currently on an official visit to the U.S., on Monday visited the National Defence University, Washington. According to a statement of the Inter-Services Public Relations, the Army Chief gave a talk on 'strategic stability in South Asia, Challenges and Way Forward.' Besides, faculty and students, selected intellectuals from local think tanks were also invited to the talk."

"Pakistan, U.S. Need Strategic Ties Based On Shared Worldview: Haqqani" "Daily Times" (02/25)

"Political transitions in the administrations of both Pakistan and the U.S. are likely to shape the foreign policies adopted by both nations, Pakistan's Ambassador to the U.S. Hussain Haqqani told a conference sponsored by the Heinz College and the Centre for International Politics and Innovation. 'The U.S. and Pakistan need to establish a strategic relationship based on a shared worldview, and President Obama and Vice President Biden understand that.'

"Pakistan Needs The Kiss Of Life" "The News" (02/25)

"The United States and Europe must give Pakistan 4-5 billion dollars in urgent aid or risk seeing the nuclear-armed country slip into chaos, two leading U.S. foreign policy voices warned on Tuesday. Democratic Senator John Kerry and Republican former senator Chuck Hagel, now chair of the Atlantic Council think tank, were to release a formal report on Wednesday appealing for international help to stabilize Pakistan."

"U.S. Senators Urge Major Rethink On Pakistan" "The News" (02/25)  
"U.S. Senators on Monday urged a rethink on aid to Pakistan after a watchdog said more than 12 billion dollars in U.S. spending had failed to eliminate the country's militant haven. The call came as the Foreign Ministers of Pakistan and neighboring Afghanistan start a week of talks in Washington with President Barack Obama's administration on how to combat extremism."

"American Military Aid For Pakistan Short Of Money" "Daily Times" (02/25)

"The U.S. Defence Department effort to help Pakistan secure its border with Afghanistan and root out Taliban fighters is underfunded by as much as 73 percent - a budget shortfall so severe that it could slow down operations next month, according to a report released on Monday."

"Government Urged To Ensure End To Drone Attacks" "The News" (02/25)

"The parliamentary committee on national security on Tuesday urged the government to use all options to stop the drone attacks on Pakistani territory."

"FBI Team Due On 27th To Question Mumbai Suspects" "The Nation" (02/25)

"A seven-member FBI team is likely to visit Pakistan on February 27 to quiz a few suspect masterminds of 26/11 Mumbai attacks who have been arrested by Pakistani authorities."

"China Willing To Improve Strategic Ties With Pakistan" "Daily Times" (02/25)

"Chinese President Hu Jintao told Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari in a telephone conversation on Tuesday that his visit to the Chinese cities of Wuhan and Shanghai was conducive to promoting pragmatic cooperation between the two countries."

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Editorials/Op-eds  
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"Scot-Free In Swat?," an editorial in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (02/25)

"There is nothing in the peace plan about punishment for those who committed all kinds of atrocities for months in Swat. The extent of the depravity of these people is almost unparalleled.... Is there to be no accountability in Swat? Will those who carried out these atrocities walk away scot-free? Will the rapists of women walk gaily past their families in the streets of Mingora? Will the murderers of young men scoff at the parents of victims? The message such a situation would send out could have grave repercussions. These must be considered by the authorities."

"Debate Over Swat 'Peace Deal', " an editorial in the Lahore-based liberal English language daily "Daily Times" (cir. 10,000) (02/25)

"The evenly poised debate over the ANP government's 'peace deal' in Swat will heat up further with Sufi Muhammad's announcement of conditions applicable to both the state troops and the Taliban.... Interpreting these demands will once again divide the political analysts. Developments in Swat will remain uncertain until all ambiguities are removed. There are things to be said in favor of the two opposed positions. Until the situation becomes clearer it is advisable to let the debate be academic and eschew bitterness."

"Positive Attitude Of Sufi Mohammad," an editorial in the Peshawar-based Urdu-language daily "Mashriq" (cir. 55,000) (02/25)

"The fundamental principle of democracy is to honor the wishes and aspirations of people, therefore it will be wrong to say that the government has retreated against a handful extremists. In fact, the government has shown pragmatic approach that it is against any such move that exacerbate the security situation and cause any further bloodshed in the otherwise a calm area."

"Mullah Mohammad Omar's Censure To Tribal Militants - A Creditable Step," an editorial in the popular rightist Urdu-language daily "Ausaf" (cir. 10,000) (02/25)

"Mullah Mohammad Omar has sent a letter to the newly formed alliance of Taliban to refrain from targeting the Pakistan Army contingents... It is a praiseworthy idea that the Jihad cannot be declared against the security forces of our own country. It is hard reality that all the infidel forces are united, but Muslims are divided in different groups and factions. India is supporting Israel, and the vice versa. Likewise, the U.S. helps Israel and the latter killed hundreds of Muslims in Gaza Stripe with the U.S. backing. It is surprising that fourteen thousands American Jewish people have joined the Israeli Army. If non-Muslim forces can unite together, why can't Muslims across the world stand united? Fighting between the Pakistan Army and the militants in FATA are not in the interest of Pakistan as a Muslim country, as both are Muslims."

"Enemy Spy Agencies' Role In The Unrest In Swat And Tribal Areas," an editorial in the Lahore-based independent Urdu daily "Din" (circ. 5000) (02/25)

"Now that it is clear that enemy spy agencies are involved in the unrest in Swat and Tribal areas, the Pakistan armed forces would have hundred percent support from the local populace if it [the army] engages in jihad against these elements. The need is to target the real enemy."

"The Political Cost," an editorial in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (02/25)

"Director General ISPR Maj. Gen. Athar Abbas could not get it more right when he said that the government had to stop the military operation in the restive Swat valley in view of the rising political cost but it was impolitic on his part to say that the option of the use of force remained open. Coming as it did, the comment could militate against the peace process initiated by the NWFP government and Tehrik-i-Nifaz-i-Shariat-i-Muhammadi."

"Peace In Swat And Maulana Soofi Muhammad," an editorial in the center-right Urdu daily "Pakistan" (cir. 10,000) (02/25)

"A careful review of the situation shows that the unrest, terrorism and bloodshed in Pakistan are a result of U.S. interference... We can say with certainty that the Army is an institution that holds the nation's welfare paramount, and does not want to aim its guns at

compatriots. Militants and citizens should also not put the Army to test. Restoration of peace in Swat and Malakand is a source of great joy for us. May this peace be permanent?"

"The Deal Starts Paying," an editorial in the Islamabad-based rightist English daily "Pakistan Observer" (cir. 5,000) (02/25)

"The successful talks between the Provincial Government and TNSM have proved that beyond any doubt. Though some circles are trying to portray the agreement with TNSM as a sort of surrender to militants, in fact this is a major achievement of the authorities in which the Government has moved closer to its object of securing peace in the troubled region.... And a report about a similar deal in Bajaur is another measure of the success and hopefully it will be replicated in the rest of the troubled areas as well."

"Swat: Education In Disarray," an editorial in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn" (cir. 55,000) (02/25)

"The reopening of schools in Swat is encouraging, particularly given the controversy over the government's decision to task Maulana Sufi Mohammad of the banned Tehrik Nifaz-i-Shariat Muhammadi with brokering a peace deal with the Taliban. However, this is merely an initial step on the long road to enforcing the writ of the state in Swat."

"Sufi's Peace Agenda," an editorial in the Lahore-based liberal English daily "The Post" (cir. 5,000) (02/25)

"It is encouraging that the TNSM has taken the initiative to bring normalcy in the troubled valley. However more steps are needed to be taken by both sides for permanent peace in the region. The basic step to bring normalcy is Swat is that all schools should be opened immediately. At present there are 350,000 students registered in Swat, 250,000 are enrolled at government schools and 100,000 at private schools. Militants have destroyed 191 schools, including 122 girls' schools, leaving 62,000 pupils without schools. It is the foremost responsibility of both sides to take such measures which are helpful in bringing atmosphere conducive for educational activities."

"Malakand Agreement: Necessary But Insufficient," an op-ed by Nasim Zehra in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (02/25)

"There are three objectives the government will seek to achieve to actually demonstrate that the Malakand peace agreement has actually 'delivered.' One to not allow the TTP-Swat to implement its own interpretation of Shariah, within and beyond the public space in Swat. Two, the government should debilitate organizationally and resource-wise, through establishment of check-posts, terror and public trials etc of organized and armed militias in Swat and beyond. Three, to prevent the TTP from functioning as a deadly and armed militia which pursues the objective of forcing its own version of Shariah through terror. The only viable effort to re-establish the writ of the state requires that the government does not compromise on these three objectives."

"Peace, But On Whose Terms?," an op-ed by Naveed Ashraf in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn" (cir. 55,000) (02/25)

"It is perhaps pragmatic to end the violence with a peace deal. But such a deal should be on the government's terms, not on the militants'. The truce should be viewed as a short-to mid-term tactic, and not a permanent settlement, giving the government time and space to maneuver."

"How Much Sovereignty Has Pakistan Conceded?," an op-ed by Shireen M. Mazari in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (02/25)

"The issue of the Pakistani state's deception of its own people, the net result is that there is no credibility left. That is why interlocutors like Sufi Mohammed become necessary. If the credibility of the government and the establishment is to be re-established, they must first come clean on the extent of the

sovereignty already surrendered to the U.S. Then they must delink from the U.S. and claim back the lost sovereignty before it is too late. Whether one likes it or not, unless Pakistan creates space between itself and the U.S., there will be no peace and security and the space for moderates will continue to shrink."

"The Imperative Of Peace In Swat," an op-ed by Mazhar Qayyum Khan in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (02/25)

"The return to normal life, already partly in evidence, like the resumption of female education that suffered most at the hands of militants should be unequivocally greeted with satisfaction. Somehow, the U.S. whose policies of force laced with unfulfilled promises of socio-economic development have been responsible for causing outrage in the country."

"More Revelations By U.S. Military Officials," an editorial note in the center-right Urdu daily "Pakistan" (cir. 10,000) (02/25)

"Pentagon spokesman has confirmed the report [about the presence of 70 U.S. experts in Pakistan] and said that the presence of war experts in Pakistan is no secret.... The government is constantly insisting that drone attacks are initiated outside the country while Google Earth has revealed otherwise. There is now no doubt about the fact that drones take off from Shamsi airbase, Balochistan, and land there safely on return.... Offering a Pakistani airbase to carry out attacks inside the country under the pretext of pursuing terrorists is extremely shameful. The government must also inform the nation about the latest revelation about the presence of a team of U.S. experts and advisers training Pak Army."

"Mumbai And Terrorism," an editorial in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn" (cir. 55,000) (02/25)

"One of the unfortunate consequences of the Mumbai attacks is that India fell back on its old 'Pakistan the terrorist, India the victim' framework, which eschews nuances of transnational religious extremists bent on causing mayhem in both countries. India must avoid the knee-jerk reaction of dismissing Pakistan's concerns on that front."

GFeierstein